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DE RUEHOT #0636/01 1291342  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 081342Z MAY 08  
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7822  
INFO RUCNCCAN/ALL CANADIAN POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 000636

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL DAS BARKS-RUGGLES

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM CA  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS TRILATERALS, MAY 15-16

REF: A. OTTAWA 593  
1B. 07 OTTAWA 1924

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Canada remains a key partner of the United States in the protection and promotion of human rights worldwide, in addition to being the home of one of the world's most successful democratic systems and strongest rule of law. Prime Minister Stephen Harper leads one of the most stable minority governments in Canadian history. His government's foreign policy style includes a transition from a traditional peacekeeping role through the UN to "peacemaking" military operations in Afghanistan under NATO and elsewhere, a greater concentration of foreign assistance in key regions (notably, Latin America and the Caribbean), and a "principle-based" approach to human rights. It is a generous donor in Iraq, Haiti, and elsewhere. Despite some domestic concerns, Canada remains fully engaged in the Security and Prosperity Partnership, which it hopes will survive the transition to the next U.S. Administration. End summary.

WELCOME!

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¶2. (U) Embassy warmly welcomes DRL Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Erica J. Barks-Ruggles and the delegation she will lead to the May 15-16 human rights trilaterals with Canada and Mexico in Ottawa. Poloff Elisabeth Zentos will act as control officer, and Embassy appreciates her inclusion as part of the delegation.

PARTNER ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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¶3. (U) As the State Department's country reports on human rights, trafficking in persons, and international religious freedom and other reporting make clear, Canada is a model for the world in terms of the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy in its own society. It is one of the world's most successful federal democracies, with an open, accountable, and effective civil service, and a fair and transparent legal system.

¶4. (U) Canada also actively promotes human rights and democracy internationally, as ref a detailed. It explicitly cites democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law as the four core values that guide its foreign policy. It works collaboratively to promote human rights and democracy through the UN Human Rights Council, the Organization of American States (notably through the Unit for the Promotion for Democracy and the implementation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter), and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (notably, the Partnership for Democratic Governance), and the Asia-Pacific Democracy Partnership, inter alia. Its Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) provides a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to respond in countries in or at risk, such as Sudan, Afghanistan, and Haiti, including a

robust Global Peace and Security Fund.

A MINORITY GOVERNMENT THAT GOVERNS LIKE A MAJORITY

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15. (SBU) The Conservative Party under PM Harper came to power in January 2006 elections, but has only 127 seats in the 308 House of Commons. (The opposition Liberal Party has the majority in the appointed Senate.) While the average duration of a Canadian minority government is one year and three months, the current government has now exceeded this average by 12 months and appears set to remain in office at least until fall 2008 -- and possibly until the required elections on October 19, 2009. (Under Conservative legislation that Parliament passed in May 2006, federal elections should take place every four years, beginning in 2009, unless a government fails at any time to win a vote of no confidence in the Commons, at which point elections would be held in the Commons, at which point elections would then take place.)

16. (U) At the opening of the Parliamentary session in October 2007 (ref b), the government outlined five areas of focus: strengthening Canada's sovereignty and security by projecting a presence into the Arctic and rebuilding the armed forces; building the economy; modernizing the federation; protecting the environment and improving health care; and, tackling crime. Despite its minority status, the government has subsequently succeeded in passing its budget (including substantial new resources for long-overdue military modernization), a comprehensive crime bill, and a motion to extend the mandate of the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan until 2011. Revised anti-terrorism legislation has passed

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the Senate and now awaits approval by the House of Commons, which should happen before the summer 2008 recess.

FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

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17. (SBU) Despite some criticism from the opposition that he is too close to President Bush personally and to the U.S. in general, PM Harper remains determined further to improve relations with the U.S. -- bilaterally, trilaterally through the Security and Prosperity Partnership, and multilaterally in NATO, the UN, and other organizations. Under the slogan "Canada is back," other new approaches have included:

-- a willingness to challenge the decades-old consensus here that the Canadian armed forces should only engage in traditional "blue hat" peacekeeping under the UN, arguing that some hard fighting -- "peacemaking," as in Afghanistan under NATO -- is sometimes necessary to gain enough security to make progress on development, democracy, and peace;

-- greater attention to Latin America and the Caribbean by shifting more aid dollars to the hemisphere, including about US\$100 million annually for Haiti as well as negotiation of free trade agreements (most recently with Colombia);

-- increased efforts to develop stronger ties with major emerging markets, especially India and China;

-- a "principle-based" approach to human rights and democratization, unlike earlier governments' willingness to go along with the multilateral consensus on human rights and democracy issues and not upsetting relations with key trading partners. PM Harper's government has challenged Belarus on its flawed elections, refused to recognize the Hamas government, officially received the Dalai Lama (in 2007) and granted him honorary citizenship (in 2006), conferred honorary citizenship to Aung San Suu Kyi (in 2008), shifted Canada's voting record at the UN to clarify its position on non-democratic regimes, and spoken out forcefully both in public and in private about human rights concerns in Cuba,

Burma, Syria, Iran, Tibet, and elsewhere;

-- while declining to provide troops to Iraq, Canada has dedicated about US\$300 million for Iraqi reconstruction through 2010, has conducted training programs for Iraqi police, diplomats, and government executives, and has spent over US\$200 million in aid for Iraqi humanitarian relief, most of it through multilateral agencies. The Canadian Forum of Federations was also involved in writing the Iraqi constitution.

SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

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¶8. (SBU) The fringe left continues to see the SPP as a mechanism for the U.S. to "steal" Canadian water and other resources and/or to form a European Union-like system under U.S. domination, but PM Harper has made clear that he values these annual meetings and that he strongly hopes that the mechanism will survive the transition to the new U.S. Administration. The government has patiently explained to the public over and over that the SPP, as well as the North American Free Trade Agreement, provide clear benefits for Canadian businesses and citizens, by leveraging North American strengths, including the vast market and integrated value chains, as well as a platform for innovation and global success.

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